

“Don’t Jobs Change?” Substitution of Professionals by Support Staff in Public Libraries, 1997-2007

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Abstract

Among MLS-level librarians, there is substantial anecdotal prevalence of the idea that administrators of public libraries seek to reduce costs by replacing MLS librarians with support staff. The migration of tasks such as copy and original cataloging and reference services to support staff has been well-documented. This study used national data from the Public Libraries Survey, from 1997 and 2007, to test this substitution hypothesis. Data indicates that for this time period, the utilization of MLS librarians as a percent of total library staffs did not diminish overall. Relative to population served, libraries did not reduce MLS positions but did increase support staffing. This has implications for understanding the 2008-2013 period of reduced public resources, and for the staffing of public libraries in the longer term.

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